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Thesis

COMIC BOOKS AND CHILDREN'S READING INTERESTS

by

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CHAPTER I

THE COMIC BOOK PROBLEM

During the past few years there have been a number of positive statements made as to the harmful effects of comic magazine reading upon the development of boys and girls, particularly in regard to their reading habits. In fact, the practice has at times been condemned with such vigor and finality that parents and teachers have been led to believe that reading the comics should be severely rationed or actually prohibited.

Believing that setting up severe restrictions is not an effective means of meeting this problem of alleged excessive comic book reading, the writer felt it might be valuable to make a study of the comic book situation in general, and the reading interests of the boys and girls of Grades Five and Six in Quincy, Massachusetts, in particular, with the purpose of ascertaining not only their chief comic book interests, but also whether these interests were causing any lessening of their general reading horizons. It seemed necessary to make as complete an appraisal of both of these factors as possible, so that suggestions could be made that might help to lead the children from their present alleged deep absorption in comic magazines to a keener desire for and appreciation of the better forms of literature.

COMIC BOOKS INTEREST MORE THAN CHILDREN

That this interest in the comic books is no small one, nor of short duration, is evident to anyone who has been engaged in educational work in the past few years, particularly in the elementary schools. It is a rare school room above Grade Four where the teacher has not discovered, and probably confiscated, these books.

The careful observer will also see evidence on every hand, in street cars, in waiting rooms, on trains, and at news stands, that reading comic books is not confined to children alone. Adults make up their fair share of the comic book reading public. Marston [1] claims that nearly half the readers are adults. However, this present study is concerned only with the child readers in the last two years of elementary school.

In the past few years many different investigators of this reading problem have published various list of figures showing the enormous circulation that this reading medium attains. The figures may differ with the investigator, but they have these attributes in common: they are always increasing, and they are always astronomical.

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[1] William Moulton Marston, "Why 100,000,000 Americans Read the Comics," The American Scholar, 1: 35, January, 1944.

A year ago Marston stated that 18,000,000 comic magazines were sold on the news stands every month. According to competent surveys, four or five persons read each magazine, which would indicate that there were at least 70,000,000 monthly readers.

In December, 1944, Yuill [2] said that there were 125 different issues of comic books on 100,000 news stands each month, with sales totaling 25,000,000. In a year this would come to the huge total of three hundred million magazines in circulation. Of course, all of the publishers of these books have had to retrench seriously the past year because of the shortage of paper, but even with this cutting down, the sales are still huge.

Whether these large figures can be taken as accurate or not, and whether the idea of the comic book is acceptable or not, it must be admitted that here is big business which may be spelled with capital letters.

The statistics on the reading of these books are most surprising especially when it is remembered that the first comic magazine, in its present form, appeared as recently as 1933. The Market Research Company of America, in a recent country-wide survey on the reading of comic books, found that comic magazines have as many readers, if not more, than the

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[2] Louise Dunlop Yuill, "The Case For the Comics", The School Executive, 64: 42, December, 1944.

comic strips in the newspapers, a public estimated at 70,000,000. [3] Zorbaugh, who quotes this survey, states that the study also found that, of children six to eleven years old, 95 per cent of the boys and 91 per cent of the girls read comic books regularly. Of adolescents twelve to seventeen years old, 87 per cent of the boys and 81 per cent of the girls were regular readers.

In another study quoted by Zorbaugh, Paul Stewart and Associates Inc. surveyed the entire population of Hudson, New York, on the reading of comic books. It was found that they were read regularly by 93 per cent of children between eight and fifteen, and by 72 per cent of boys and girls of the ages of sixteen and seventeen.

The writer found that among the 770 children in GradesFive andSix, in Quincy, Massachusetts, who were questioned on this subject, 97.5 per cent of the boys and 96.1 per cent of the girls admitted that they read the comics, although all of these children could not be considered "regular" readers.

In a recent survey of the activities and interests of 362 pupils at Center Junior High School in Chicopee,

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[3] Harvey Zorbaugh, "The Comics--There they Stand," The Journal of Educational Sociology, 18: 197-198, December, 1944.

Massachusetts,[4] the question was asked, "How many comic books do you read weekly?". The replies showed that 83 per cent of the pupils read the books; 38 per cent, one or two a week; 15 per cent, three or four a week; while 5 per cent read over ten magazines a week.

Not only children and adolescents are readers of these magazines. The Market Research survey showed that of men and women between the ages of eighteen and thirty, 41 per cent of the men and 28 per cent of the women were regular readers, while in the group over thirty years of age, 16 per cent of the men and 12 per cent of the women were readers.

The Stewart survey showed that among adults, 27 per cent of men and women from eighteen to thirty-five read the comics, and 10 per cent of those over thirty-five years of age.

Although figures in regard to the reading of comic books by service men are impossible to secure, according to Time Magazine,[5] comic magazines outsell Life, Reader's Digest, and The Saturday Evening Post combined ten to one at Army post exchanges.

It must be recognized that here is a cultural factor comparable to the motion picture and the radio in its breadth,

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[4] Student Survey, The Massachusetts Teacher, (Official organ of the Massachusetts Teachers Federation) 24: 8, February, 1945.

[5] "Comic Culture," Time Magazine, p. 87, December 18, 1944.

and in equal need for study to ascertain just where its appeal lies, particularly for young people; whether it is affecting their other interests, notably reading, as is so often claimed; and whether it can be adapted to serve "legitimate" purposes, especially in education.

FORERUNNERS OF THE COMIC BOOK

Although this study is confined to children's interests in comic magazines, ignoring the equally large field of the comic strips published in practically all of the daily and Sunday papers, it is realized that the magazine is a direct outgrowth of the newspaper strip.

In fact, the picture strip or picture story is as old as history itself. The ancestors of the present comic book include Sumerian army actions recorded on tablets long buried in the desert, and picture strips from Egyptian tombs showing the daily life activities along the Nile.

M. C. Gaines, publisher of the Superman-DC group of comic magazines,[6] describes an exhibit of these picture stories down through the ages which was assembled by the American Institute of Graphic Arts a few years ago. The earliest example shown is a drawing copied from a cave in Cogul, Spain, depicting a buffalo hunt and the subsequent celebra-

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[6] M. C. Gaines, "Narrative Illustration--The Story of the Comics," Print: A Quarterly Journal of the Graphic Arts, pp. 1-8, Summer, 1942.

tion over its success.

A ninth century manuscript, known as the Bamberg Bible, offers Nature as an actor in the picture story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The tree protects Adam and Eve at first, and then in a later scene points an accusing finger-branch at them much in the Walt Disney style.

The Kozanji scrolls, painted by Toba Sojo, a Japanese, in the eleventh century, shows an early use of animals to satirize human beings. The scroll depicts hares and frogs in humorous archery tournaments, and engaged in aquatic sports and wrestling matches. It also shows a monkey, dressed in the garb of a Buddhist priest, officiating in religious rites.

With the invention in the seventeenth century of new methods of printing and engraving, opportunities for greater use of this medium arrived, and from then on to the present its development has been rapid, beginning with William Hogarth's "The Rake's Progress", and continuing with the work of George Cruikshank in England, and Gustave Dore in France.

Cartoons, particularly on political subjects, had been in use in this country during the nineteenth century, but it was not until 1894 that R. F. Outcault, a staff artist on the New York World, started to make a picture sequence which later developed into "The Yellow Kid". This was the real beginning of the American comic strip.

Before the turn of the century, Outcault had been emulated by a number of other newspaper artists, notably Fred Opper, creator of "Happy Hooligan" and other popular characters of the day, and Rudolph Dirks, who originated the strip called "The Katzenjammer Kids", and who incidentally still carries it on under the title, "The Captain and the Kids".

Early in the nineteen hundreds the daily comic strip appeared, initiated by Winsor McCay with his "Little Nemo" fantasy. Since then the strips have increased in number and type by leaps and bounds until it would be an endless task to enumerate the artists and their creations.

THE FIRST COMIC BOOK APPEARS

The first comic book appeared in 1911,[7] and was a collection of Bud Fisher's "Mutt and Jeff" newspaper strip comics. This was a book about eighteen inches wide and five or six inches high, and was published to be offered as a premium to newspaper subscribers. The innovation was quite successful, but the idea of the book form did not appeal to publishers at this time, and it was not until 1933 that the comic book in its modern form made its bow. This was called "Funnies on Parade" and was a collection of reprints from the Sunday comic pages.

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[7]Hayden Weller, "The First Comic Book," The Journal of Educational Sociology, 18: 195, December, 1944.

It is interesting to note that this book, together with the next one, "Famous Funnies", a book containing reprints of the "Skippy" Sunday paper comics, were sold to large companies to be used as advertising premiums.

"Famous Funnies" was used also as the title of the first comic book to be offered for sale to the general public. This book was sold at first through chain stores and later on by news stands. Its success caused other magazines to be started, all of them employing the same general format, and using reprints of Sunday paper comics for their content.

The first original art work appeared in 1935 in a comic book called "Fun", but the wide use of original material for these magazines did not really get started until the advent of "Superman" in 1938. This was an immediate success and inspired such creations as "Batman", "Captain Midnight", Captain America", "Captain Marvel", "Wonder Woman", and many other super-characters, each of whom has his or her own book, or books, as settings for fantastic and adventurous deeds.

When the wide appeal of these books became evident, and their circulation figures began mounting rapidly, many parents, educators, clergymen, and psychiatrists became so alarmed at this new influence on children that the publishers of Parents' Magazine decided to combat what was felt to be their pernicious effects by bringing out their own publication, "True Comics". Using the same format, color, and art work of the

other comic books, but operating under the motto, "Truth is stranger and a thousand times more thrilling than fiction," this magazine has had a great deal of success, especially as far as parental approval is concerned, and has been followed by "Calling All Girls","Real Heroes", and "Funny Book".

For the past two and a half years the Superman-DC group have been publishing "Picture Stories from the Bible", using the comic book colored continuity technique. At present, these books are being used in some 2,000 Protestant Sunday Schools in this country.

According to the latest sources available there are at least 125 different issues of various types of these comic books on sale at news stands today. Are they a menace to public morals and good taste? Are they wasting the time of the children who read them? Are they seriously affecting the amount of "legitimate" reading of children? Have these books qualities that can be adapted to educational purposes?

Whatever the answers to these questions may be, it might be well to consider what Louise Dunlop Yuill says of the comics:

> Whether we appreciate them or not, it's time we realized that the comics are growing up. Of course there are still good ones and bad ones. But the leaders among them are definitely arriving at a maturity of purpose. It is time we were coming down from the scoffer's seat.[8]

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[8]Louise Dunlop Yuill, op. cit., 64: 44.

CHAPTER II

CRITICISMS AND STUDIES OF COMIC BOOKS

Although comic strips had had a deep appeal for children since the beginning of the century, first as colored supplements in the Sunday newspapers and later as regular features of the daily editions, no particular attention was paid by parents or educators to any possible harmful effect of this reading interest. However, with the emergence of the comics in book or magazine form critics began to appear.

The comic book had come upon the scene rather silently and had grown to considerable circulation before some of the more articulate critics began to ridicule them, and call attention to the baneful effects they would have upon the development of children who read them.

These critics seemed to lose sight of the fact that every new medium of expression or communication has always aroused opposition and adverse criticism just as every scientific invention or discovery has done. The history of the motion picture and radio have only to be recalled to prove this statement.

NORTH VIEWS THE COMICS WITH ALARM

In the Chicago Daily News for May 8, 1940,

Sterling North,[1] book reviewer for that paper, wrote:

> Virtually every child in America is reading color "comic" magazines--a poisonous mushroom growth of the last two years.
>
> Ten million of these sex-horror serials are sold every month. One million dollars are taken from the pockets of America's children in exchange for graphic insanity.
>
> ---
>
> The old dime novels in which an occasional redskin bit the dust were classic literature compared to the sadistic drivel pouring from the presses today.
>
> Badly drawn, badly written and badly printed--a strain on young eyes and young nervous systems--the effect of these pulp-paper nightmares is that of a violent stimulant. Their crude blacks and reds spoil the child's sense of color; their hypodermic injection of sex and murder make the child impatient with better, though quieter, stories. Unless we want a coming generation even more ferocious than the present one, parents and teachers throughout America must band together to break the "comic" magazine.
>
> ---
>
> The shame lies largely with the parents who don't know and don't care what their children are reading. It lies with unimaginative teachers who force stupid, dull twaddle down eager young throats, and, of course, it lies with the completely immoral publishers of the "comics"--guilty of a cultural slaughter of the innocents.
>
> But the antidote to the "comic" magazine poison can be found in any library or good bookstore. The parent who does not acquire that antidote for his child is guilty of criminal negligence.

The same writer, in an article in the National Parent-Teacher Magazine for November, 1941,[2] claimed that a

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[1] Sterling North, Editorial,"A National Disgrace," Chicago Daily News, May 8, 1940.

[2] Sterling North, "The Creative Way Out," National Parent-Teacher Magazine, 35: 16, November, 1941.

"pro-Fascist" pattern was supplied to children by the comics "replete with violent fantasy and impossible hallucinations."

FADIMAN CONSIDERS COMIC BOOKS OFFER NOTHING

Clifton Fadiman,[3] the well known literary critic and master of ceremonies on the radio program, "Information Please", wrote in regard to children's reading in the introduction to his book, "Reading I've Liked" as follows:

> ----it seems to me that the trash of my generation was superior to the trash of today. I submit that The Rover Boys in the Everglades and Frank on a Gunboat are preferable to Superman and his kind on two counts: they were cleanly and clearly written, and their characters were credible and not entirely unrelated to the child's experience. When I was nine I could learn something interesting about life from even such highly colored affairs as the Frank Merriwell series, but I know that myson can learn nothing whatsoever of genuine interest (that is, which he can check against the expanding universe within himself) from the comics. I believe firmly that the current juvenile literature of the impossible is meretricious compared with the honest hackwork my own generation enjoyed. I also think that the kids are about ready to kick over this thriller fare in favor of something saner and more natural.

The above criticisms were among the more extreme indictments that were launched at the comics as soon as their deep appeal for children was realized. North's editorial was widely quoted. Many of the clergy, and numerous Parent-Teacher associations took up the cudgels against this new and popular reading material for the young.

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[3] Clifton Fadiman, Reading I've Liked, (New York--Simon and Schuster, 1941) p. xvi.

That some of this criticism was merited was very evident, and it was somewhat effective, as it stimulated the publication by Parents' Magazine of "True Comics", and later "Calling All Girls", and "Real Heroes", which have very effectively utilized the techniques that cause the comic books to intrigue children, namely, plenty of action, plenty of pictures, and plenty of color.

The adverse comments were also instrumental in causing some of the largest publishers of these magazines to secure well known educators, child psychologists, and workers with children as members of their advisory boards. This has had a most beneficial effect upon the content of these books, and the methods of its presentation.

THE CHILD STUDY ASSOCIATION LOOKS AT THE COMICS

Josette Frank and Mrs. Hugh Grant Straus[4] working as members of the Children's Book Committee of the Child Study Association of America undertook the evaluation of about 100 current comic books in 1943. They did not attempt to list any "approved" or "recommended" titles because of the changing nature of the magazines, but they did classify them into ten roughly divided types, namely, adventure, fantastic adventure, war, crime and detective, real stories and biography, jungle

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[4] Josette Frank, "Looking at the Comics," Child Study, 20: 112-118, Summer, 1943.

adventure, animal cartoons, fun and humor, love interest, and retold classics.

They found that adventure and fantastic adventure, as typified by the feats of "Superman", "Batman", "Flash Gordon" and the like were most popular with children. It did not appear that children were harmed by a limited amount of such reading, but that an excess of this type of reading was not advisable. The sameness in these hero stories did not seem to bother children as much as it would adults.

As to thecrime and detective type of book they found that "Crime does not pay," was the theme in practically all of these magazines, and that the frequently expressed fears of adults that reading about crimes makes criminals was not justified by any competent evidence.

Contrary to general belief, they discovered a considerable amount of humor in the comics, though not as much as the name would imply, and not nearly enough in their opinion.

They noted that in all comics the outstanding ingredient was action, a factor indicating their great appeal to children. Also the comics were contemporary, they dealt with all of the up-to-the-minute scientific gadgets. Furthermore they used very colloquial language, intriguing to youngsters but not likely to affect their language habits too much or too permanently. Finally, and perhaps most important, they were easy to read.

The Committee concluded that adults should not be too obvious about choosing comic books for children. Here is the only reading matter that really comes within a child's purchasing power, and perhaps he should be given a certain freedom of choice in his purchases. However, parents should help children to discriminate in quality and worth, and should certainly govern the amount of comic book reading done.

Sidonie M. Gruenberg, Director of the above-mentioned Child Study Association,[5] feels that the comic book publishers are now producing a considerable amount of effective educational materials in their publications, some of which are incidental to already established stories, and others which are deliberately planned to convey some special message, more or less directly, or through dramatic entertainment.

The Superman-DC group has published "The Twain Shall Meet" on racial misunderstandings and prejudices, and another book on the same subject, "Comic Cavalcade," in cooperation with the East and West Association, of which Pearl Buck is the president. The same group devoted "The Justice Society of America" in its "All-Star Comics" to a series called "A Cure for the World", emphasizing the lesson that justice means justice for all regardless of race, creed, or color. Another

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[5] Sidonie M. Gruenberg, "The Comics as a Social Force," Journal of Educational Sociology, 18: 210, December, 1944.

series of publications of this group, "Picture Stories from the Bible", has recently been assembled in a book of 232 pages in color presenting the whole story of the Old Testament under an advisory council consisting of well known educators and church leaders.

The Parents' Magazine publication, "True Comics", has made a feature of the presentation of factual material in contrast to fiction and fantastic adventure. Such material has covered current events, history, social studies, science, and biographies of prominent persons. Such topics as "The Common Cold", "How the Radio Guides Planes", "Railroads on the March", and "There Are No Master Races" taken at random from different copies show the variety and types of subjects presented.

Other examples showing the use of the comic book technique for educational or social purposes are evidenced by the work done by "Master Comics", published by The Fawcett Publications Inc. This group has cooperated with the Writer's War Board in presenting many important ideas for popular information and education. "Captain Marvel", under the same auspices, shows children that the police are their friends, and that the courts exist to help youngsters in trouble as well as to punish them. "Captain Midnight", another super-hero in this group, has shown in his adventures at different times the menace of inflation, the dangers of Nazi propaganda, and how to

nullify the efforts of our traitors at home.

Without making a complete survey of the comic field she found that random samples showed many other series with educational possibilities. She concluded that while the comics combine pictures with words, they fall far short of the best that pictures can do, and also far short of the best that words can do. However, they deserve the serious consideration of statesmen and educators, politicians and publicists, psychologists and sociologists, for they reflect what the people are thinking about, and how they feel about matters of social significance.

YUILL SEES EDUCATIONAL VALUE IN COMIC BOOKS

Louise Dunlop Yuill,[6] Director of Parent Activities for Residence Halls at Teachers College, Columbia University, after studying the comic book situation found the same facts to be true about the type of materials being used by the publishers of the better known comic books. She concluded:

> The comic technique--action pictures plus a few words--has met the need of the great masses of our non-reading public. A good story in comic technique will be read sooner than a poor story done in conventional script. The opposite is also true. Through this medium the reader can get entertainment and information with a minimum of effort.

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[6]Louise Dunlop Yuill, "The Case for the Comics," The School Executive, 64: 44, December, 1944.

As a source of material to meet the reading problems in the higher age levels, the comics are invaluable to the school. The reading difficulty is approximately of sixth grade level, but the subject matter is considerably more mature.

Let's not be afraid to use the comics as an educational weapon--remembering also that it possesses the "open sesame" to doors and minds barred to all other literature.

EDUCATORS EXAMINE THE COMIC BOOK

As an example of what educators in the field think of the comic book, Ruth Strang, [7] of Teachers College, Colorado University, said in their favor that the comics constitute a kind of folklore, like the old Greek and Norse myths. They meet the children's need for overcoming, in their imagination, some of their limitations in age and ability, and for obtaining a sense of adventure denied them in real life. They also offer to children of limited reading ability a form of reading experience that is really enjoyable to them. If children actually read the text of the comics they will profit by extensive supplementary reading and will be exposed to a wide range of vocabulary, including many words they repeatedly encounter in other reading.

On the negative side, she believes that extensive reading of the comics tends to crowd out reading of a more desir-

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[7] Ruth Strang, "Why Children Read the Comics," Elementary School Journal, 43: 336-342, February, 1943.

able type, and that many poor readers merely get the story from the pictures without making an effort to read the text. Also, the adventures portrayed in the comics are so farfetched that children do not acquire from reading them an understanding of the world as it is, such as they would obtain from reading material that is closer to life experiences.

She concludes that the comics meet the needs of many children at certain ages, and that they serve a transitory purpose that should lead to better reading interests. Adults should advocate moderation rather than abstinence from reading comics, and should realize that comic book values differ with individual children. As for educators, she feels that they might wisely turn toward a positive program for comic book improvement, and utilize them as one other avenue of education.

As an outstanding example of this use in education "Superman" has been enlisted to aid in the teaching of grammar and safety at the Junior High School level in Lynn, Massachusetts, for the past two years. Harold Downes, a teacher, in cooperation with M. C. Gaines, publisher of the magazine, worked out a series of workbooks in these subjects which have been claimed to be very successful. Plans are also being made to carry out this same idea in the teaching of social studies as soon as the paper restrictions are lifted by the government.

W. W. D. Sones, [8] Professor of Education at the University of Pittsburgh, also believes that the comic book has possibilities in teaching. For certain types of pupils, usually those who are older than the average for the group, there is a dearth of suitable reading material at the middle grade and Junior High school level. Available material may be proper for the reading ability but not for the reading interest. For this group the comic book may provide just the type of reading matter that is needed, as most comics are about sixth grade level in reading difficulty.

The non-academic child may also benefit from the proper and well chosen comic book use, since he may be bored and rather rebellious when the formal school subjects are presented in a too formal way. Sones feels that the intemperate use of comic books should be avoided, but that the wise teacher will have no difficulty in determining what is a moderate and effective employment of this medium.

May Hill Arbuthnot, [9] Associate Professor of Education at Western Reserve University School of Education, and authority on children's books, was quoted in the Christian Science Monitor recently:

The funnies are useful too. They are the introduc-

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[8]W. W. D. Sones, "Comics in the Classroom," The School Executive, 63: 31-32, October, 1943.

[9]May Hill Arbuthnot, quoted in article, "The Comics Don't Disturb Her," Christian Science Monitor, p.7, February 3, 1945.

> tion to reading for thousands of children. Children pore over them with the help of adult interpreters long before they come to school and are that much more ready for reading. You might wish their introductory material had been of a higher order, at least the comic has made children want to read, and they know that reading is going to be fun. Not such a bad start after all.

Mrs. Arbuthnot thinks the motion pictures and radio programs have accustomed children to more exciting tales than they would ordinarily be reading, and that children's books today must meet this challenge. Children need fine stories, but they want plots, action, and subjects they can respect.

Although not a comic enthusiast herself, she is not at all discouraged about the deep interest that adults and children show for this sort of reading. She says the comics are popular because they are easy to read, easy to get, and exciting.

ARMSTRONG CHANGES HIS OPINION

Indicative of the change of opinion that has occurred with many educators in the past few years is that expressed by David T. Armstrong,[10] head of the English Department at Emerson High school, Union City, New Jersey. Although his opinion is based on the examination of only one comic book, it is well worth consideration.

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[10] David T. Armstrong, "How Good are the Comic Books," Elementary English Review, 21: 283-285, December, 1944.

He had been very inimical to comic books on principle and had spoken against them frequently before various organizations. One day, after a youngster had challenged him to read one and see what it was like, he purchased a copy of "All-Star Comics", a Superman publication, buying this particular book, because Superman had always been his chief target.

He found these things in favor of this comic book: an imposing array of public figures and educators on the editorial advisory board; a reading list reviewed by a consultant on children's reading of the Child Study Association of America--and a very good list; the content, although in error on a number of fact, taught some excellent lessons on tolerance and international relations.

He also felt that a fair opinion of this one magazine must allow that the vocabulary was on a high level; that this type of reading encouraged more reading; and that the values shown in this one issue were wholesome.

The conclusion reached was that whether the comic book could be used as a class room adjunct was still a moot point but that educators could not ignore the comics any more than they could the radio or the moving picture, as a powerful social factor.

THORNDIKE STUDIES COMIC BOOK WORDS

In 1941, in answer to the many criticisms that were

being made as to the adequacy of the reading experiences furnished children by comic books, Robert L. Thorndike, [11] of Teachers College, Columbia University, made a study of this aspect of the magazines. The study was confined to single copies of four books most popular at that time, "Superman," "Batman," "Action Comics," and "Detective Comics," all products of Superman-DC Publications.

He found that a count of words in the text showed that each book had an average of 10,000 words of reading matter, rather surprising when it is realized the comic magazine is usually considered to be primarily a picture book. With this word content, the child who read a comic book once a month throughout the school year would get as much wordage reading as he would from the average fourth or fifth grade reading book.

Each comic book contained about 1,000 different words, and all four books together about 3,000 different words, other than those in the first thousand of the Thorndike list. Many of these words would be rather uncommon in the reading of the normal elementary school pupil, but were words that he probably should be encouraged to learn.

Although somewhat more than 20 per cent of the words encountered were slang, he did not feel that the language of

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[11] Robert L. Thorndike, "Words and the Comics," Journal of Experimental Education, 10: 110-112, December, 1941.

these magazines was excessively slangy. The bulk of the vocabulary was standard English containing many hundreds of words that a child needs to meet as his reading experience expands.

As to the reading difficulty of the text material, he stated that estimated by the Lorge formula, it fell at about the fifth and sixth grade level.

Thorndike concluded that, whatever their other vices or virtues, the comic books provided a substantial amount of reading experience at late elementary school level or a little higher, and that in view of the facts he discovered, and the apparent interest and appeal of this type of material for children, such books might have real value for the educator who is interested in taking children as they are and leading them from their present interests to higher and better things.

The opinions of educators expressed above in regard to comic books have largely concerned their content or language, and with the exception of Thorndike's study, have been based upon more or less subjective reasoning. There have been very few real studies made as to just what comic books children were reading, and why they were reading those particular comic books. Some investigations have been made concerning children's interests in newspaper comic strips, but outside of Witty's study in 1941 at Evanston and Chicago, Illinois, Reynolds' questioning of pupils at the Dalton School in

New York in 1942, and McCarthy and Smith's investigation into the subject in Duluth, Minnesota, in 1943, the actual preferences of boys and girls for certain comic magazines, and their reasons for liking them, have received very little objective attention.

WITTY STUDIES COMIC BOOK PREFERENCES IN ILLINOIS

Dr. Paul Witty, Professor of Education at Northwestern University, in 1941 made a rather extensive investigation into the extent of, and preferences in, comic reading in Grates Four, Five, and Six, which resulted in the publication of two papers in the Journal of Experimental Education. Although Witty's study concerned children's interests in both comic books and newspaper comic strips, for the purpose of this paper, reference will be limited to the data secured on comic magazines.

The first part of the study [12] was conducted in Evanston, Illinois, where 334 boys and girls in the three grades were interrogated, both by questionnaire and personal interview. It was found that of the twelve comic magazines rated as the best liked by both sexes, "Superman", and "Batman" attained first and second for both boys and girls in all

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[12] Paul Witty, "Children's Interests in Reading the Comics," Journal of Experimental Education, 10:100-104, December, 1941.

grades, as shown in Table I. There was also a conspicuous similarity in the ranks assigned the favorite magazines in all grades, as shown in Table II, there appearing to be little difference in comic book preference between the grades. Moreover, the choices of the boys and girls were similar.

The pupils were also questioned as to whether they made original comics of their own. The answers to this question are shown in Table III, and indicate there was a decided tendency in this direction, as about two-thirds of the children in Grade Four reported participation in this activity, while in Grades Five and Six this interest still persisted, over half of the pupils in Grade Five and nearly 60 per cent of those in Grade Six indicating that they found pleasure in making their own comics.

Witty also made an investigation of the interests of 2500 public school children in the same grades in Evanston and Chicago, Illinois, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, covering the same points as those in the above study.[13] Questionnaires were used, and a system of random sampling employed. with eliminations and additions, until it appeared that the method provided a reliable picture of the entire group.

The favorite comic magazines of this larger group are shown in Table IV according to their ranking by both sexes.

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[13] Paul Witty, "Reading the Comics--A Comparative Study", ibid.,10: 105-109, December, 1941.

TABLE I

RANKING GIVEN BY BOYS AND GIRLS TO THE TWELVE COMIC MAGAZINES GIVEN HIGHEST RANKING BY BOTH SEXES IN WITTY'S EVANSTON STUDY

Name of Magazine	Both Sexes	Boys	Girls
Superman	1	2	1
Batman	2	1	2
Famous Funnies	3	6	3
Action	4	3	8
Flash	5	4	7
Detective	6	5	12
Ace	7	8.5	6
Jungle	8	10	5
*Tip Top	9	13	4
True Comics	10	8.5	16
Donald Duck	11	11.5	9.5
Planet	12	13.5	9.5

*Not listed in questionnaire. Added by children in spaces provided for others.

One more book is mentioned than in the list shown in Table I for the Evanston survey, but again the similarity is notable between the choices of boys and girls. "Batman" and "Superman" again show themselves to be in the two top places. "Famous Funnies" occupies just about the same position with both sexes and with the girls that it does in the Evanston study, as does "True Comics." However, "Donald Duck" is not mentioned at all in this study, although it is in next to last place with both sexes in the previous study. The significance of this will be discussed later in this paper.

The books favored by the different grades are displayed in Table V. Here again the similarity of choice of the grades is an outstanding feature, and since the results in Table V are remarkably like those shown in Table II, it is obvious that the most popular books have a general and similar interest for each grade.

Again in this survey, as in the previous one, the question was asked concerning the children's interest in making their own comics. The results, shown in Table VI, indicated that in Grades Four and Six in this latter group, a slightly smaller percentage was interested in this activity, while in Grade Five the percentage was greater than in the Evanston group. Results for both sexes in all grades, however, showed that exactly half of the pupils enjoyed this work.

TABLE II

FAVORITE COMIC MAGAZINES BY GRADES AS SHOWN IN WITTY'S EVANSTON SURVEY

(In Order of Preference)

Grade IV	Grade V	Grade VI
Superman	Superman	Batman
Batman	Batman	Superman
Flash	Famous Funnies	Famous Funnies
Famous Funnies	Flash	Action
Jungle	Ace	Tip Top
True Comics	Walt Disney	Detective
Donald Duck	Donald Duck	Flash
Tip Top	Weird	Jungle
Magic	War	Ace
Detective	Super	Planet
Action	Detective	True Comics
Green Mask	Action	Donald Duck

Individual case studies of children's reading programs made by Witty in the course of this survey showed that in many instances boys and girls who were doing a great deal of comic book reading were also following reading patterns of their own which were quite rich and generally commendable. On the other hand there were some who read very few comics

TABLE III

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF BOYS AND GIRLS WHO LIKE TO MAKE ORIGINAL COMICS AS SHOWN IN WITTY'S EVANSTON STUDY

Grade	Both Sexes		Boys		Girls	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
IV	37	67	27	75	30	61
V	61	51	29	50	32	52
VI	77	59	39	56	38	62
All Grades	195	59	95	58	100	58

and also very little general reading. These case studies indicated that one could not generalize concerning this phase of the subject. An amount of comic book reading that might seem excessive for some children when viewed in the light of a well balanced reading program, might not appear too harmful. Similarly, a small amount of comic reading might be associated with either a desirable or an undesirable reading pattern.

Witty concluded that a very popular pastime with boys and girls was the reading of comic magazines, of which the most frequently mentioned were "Superman", "Batman", and "Famous Funnies". These were favorites in all grades studied, that is Grades Four, Five, and Six.

Another indication of the interest of children in the comics was shown by their tendency to make comics of their own, a practice that was found to be popular with about half the children in the three grades.

He felt that the data revealed a need for a realistic approach on the part of teachers and parents in dealing with the comics. Children's interests in these books was similar to those found in other forms of reading, in the motion pictures, and in the radio, and for this reason a rather complete appraisal of each child's interests and his own nature was necessary if the proper means were to be employed to guide him toward better things.

REYNOLDS QUESTIONS CHILDREN IN NEW YORK

George R. Reynolds [14] while teaching at the Dalton School in New York became interested in the comic book situation and attempted to find out why children read the comics.

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[14] George R. Reynolds, "The Child's Slant on the Comics," The School Executive, 62: 17, September, 1942.

TABLE IV

RANKING GIVEN TO THE THIRTEEN COMIC MAGAZINES GIVEN HIGHEST RANKING BY BOTH SEXES IN WITTY'S SURVEY IN EVANSTON, CHICAGO, AND MILWAUKEE

(Random Sampling)

Name of Magazine	Both Sexes	Boys	Girls
Batman	1	1	2
Superman	2	2	1
Jungle	3	9	3
Famous Funnies	4	9	4
Flash	6	4	10.5
Ace	6	11	5
Magic	6	6.5	6
Action	8	4	13
Detective	9	4	*
True	10	9	13
Green Mask	12	*	8
Shadow	12	*	8
Wings	12	6.5	*

* Listed by one person.

Although his questioning of the children there would hardly be considered a study of the problem the results have a certain amount of importance for one who is looking into the subject.

He secured his information in three different ways. First, he interviewed boys and girls of the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Grades, questioning them casually about their comic book interests during play periods, at recess, and at other odd times, but never in class. Second, he met with and questioned separately the boys and girls of a Fourth grade, finding them very anxious to express their opinions on comic magazines. Third, he received three written opinions on the same subject from some of his own pupils who asked if they might write about their favorite comics instead of doing a regularly assigned book review.

The investigation showed that the Dalton School boys and girls read comic magazines for these reasons:

1. Ignorance of availability of good books
2. Comic magazines are easy to read
3. Comic books help satisfy the collecting urge
4. Comic magazines have sports stories
5. The books are exciting
6. Comic magazines are cheap
7. Comic book art is satisfactory to children
8. The magazines are amusing

TABLE V

FAVORITE COMIC MAGAZINES BY GRADES AS SHOWN IN WITTY'S SURVEY IN EVANSTON, CHICAGO AND MILWAUKEE

(Random Sampling)

(In Order of Preference)

Grade IV	Grade V	Grade VI
Batman	Batman	Batman
Superman	Superman	Superman
Famous Funnies	Jungle	Flash
Magic	Ace	Action
Jungle	Action	Famous Funnies
Flash	Detective	Jungle
Shadow	Crack	Ace
Green Mask	Adventure	Detective
Planet	Flash	Mystery
Ace	Famous Funnies	True
True	Fantastic	Magic
Wings		Tip Top
Blue Beetle		Wings

9. Comic books are a fad

"True Comics" was found to be by far the most popular of the comic magazines with these children, but it seemed to accompany the reading of the other types of comics rather than to replace them.

TABLE VI

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF BOYS AND GIRLS WHO LIKE TO MAKE ORIGINAL COMICS AS SHOWN IN WITTY'S STUDY IN EVANSTON, CHICAGO, AND MILWAUKEE

(Random Sampling)

Grade	Both Sexes		Boys		Girls	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
IV	16	48	8	53	8	44
V	19	57	11	68	8	47
VI	15	44	8	44	7	44
All Grades	50	50	27	55	23	45

Reynolds concluded that comic books were harmful to the extent that they influenced reading tastes, and to the extent that they made children "bloodthirsty", but he felt that a new sense of "make-believe and humor" tempered this tendency. It appeared to him that the comics were taking the same relative position in the child's modern world that the

"dime novels" took in the world of yesterday.

McCARTHY AND SMITH INVESTIGATE COMICS IN MINNESOTA

In 1943, a group of pediatricians in Duluth, Minnesota, suggested that a study of the comic book situation be undertaken in that city. Under the auspices of the Women's Institute, Sister M. Katharine McCarthy, a teacher in the College of Saint Scholastics, and Marion W. Smith, a teacher in the public schools carried out this investigation. [15]

They submitted a questionnaire to 8,608 children in Grades Four to Nine in both public and private schools of the city. This questionnaire consisted of but three questions outside of the usual routine information, the questions being:

> Do you read comic magazines or books?
>
> About how many comic magazines do you read a week?
>
> What comic magazine do you like best?

The answers to this questionnaire revealed that in the week preceding the study the 8,608 children had read 25,395 comic books. Only 935 children, or a little over ten per cent had read no comics at all.

The favorite comic magazines in the order named were "Batman", "Superman", "Donald Duck", and "Tip Top Comics".

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[15] M. Katharine McCarthy and Marion W. Smith, "The Much Discussed Comics", Elementary School Journal, 44: 97-101, October, 1943.

With the exception of "Donald Duck" these results showed very close correlation with the answers to Witty's questions.

The investigators wished to find out if possible the reasons for the appeal of the comic magazine, but felt that this factor would not be adequately answered by pupils who had answered the questionnaire. Instead they arranged to ask children in one school in Chicago, and in one school in Minneapolis, to answer, without signature, this question:

Why do you like comic magazines?

Answers were received from 350 children and were tabulated as follows:

121	named	Humor
90	named	Adventure
52	said	The pictures made reading easier
46	said	They liked reading them just for a pastime
21	said	They liked them because they solved crime
20	said	They liked them for various reasons

McCarthy and Smith felt that the liking for adventure was a perfectly normal reaction on the part of the children, but that it was often difficult to see where the humor existed in the magazines. The crime solving of the comics seemed to appeal to the Robin Hood instinct of children. They believed that reading the comics for a pastime was an indictment of both teachers and parents.

They concluded that the paper and coloring of the magazines was too often of poor quality, and that the language

was frequently undesirable. There also appeared to be too much crime depicted in the books. Furthermore, reading the comics stimulated too much day-dreaming and wishful thinking to make them desirable for nervous children. Suggestion was made that in order to improve the situation children be guided toward better reading habits and more healthful recreations.

COMIC MAGAZINES SHOW IMPROVEMENT

In summary it might be said that a search into the rather limited literature that is available regarding comic magazines shows that the earlier criticisms of this new medium tended toward the severely condemnatory. The adverse critics were most articulate, or at least received more willing acceptance of their views than did the less accusing commentators. These hostile opinions were merited unquestionably, and had the beneficial effect of causing the larger and more forward looking publishers to seek the advice and counsel of competent men and women in the fields of education and child psychology.

Due in great measure to this influence the content of the publications of the larger producers of these magazines has greatly improved, and during the past three years, opinions as to their harmful effects have been less prominent. In fact, at times some of the material written concerning them has bordered on the unduly laudatory. Much of this

praise, however, has seemed to come from persons who are more or less closely connected with the production of these books, either as publishers or as members of advisory councils.

The truth probably lies between these extreme views. Although the art and color work, and the printing and lettering, of these magazines still leaves much to be desired, and in fact is most offensive to many people, the material presented in the better books is probably time-wasting at its worst, and of definite informational and educational value at its best. The comic books, with their pictorial technique of presenting fact, fiction, and propaganda, are apparently here to stay. They must be improved and utilized for commendable purposes, rather than being condemned and prohibited.

CHAPTER III

A STUDY OF COMIC MAGAZINES IN QUINCY, MASSACHUSETTS

The writer, like the majority of educators in close touch with the children, has been very much aware of the increasing absorption in comic books evidenced by elementary school pupils in the past few years. So many comments have been made by teachers and parents about their deep concern in regard to this type of pupils' reading, and its suspected effect upon their other reading interests, that it seemed wise to make some investigation of the situation and discover if possible whether such suspicions were well founded.

METHOD OF STUDY

The most efficient and complete method of searching out the necessary facts appeared to be by interrogating a fairly large group of pupils of both sexes at the ages or grades where previous investigators had found a high degree of interest shown in this form of reading, namely, at the Fifth and Sixth grade level. The fact that several investigators, including Thorndike, had concluded that the language difficulty of comic books was approximately at the Sixth grade level was another cogent reason.

With the permission of the Superintendent of Schools, the pupils in these grades in six elementary schools in the

northern part of Quincy, Massachusetts, were selected to be questioned, practically all of the children coming from homes in reasonably comfortable circumstances. In this section of the city of about 80,000 population there is no evidence of the two extremes of economic condition, dire poverty or very great wealth.

A questionnaire was prepared and presented to 770 pupils in the six elementary schools on December 11, 1944, the distribution of pupils by schools and sexes being shown in Table VII. It will be seen that a total of 408 boys and 362 girls returned questionnaires.

TABLE VII

NUMBER OF BOYS AND GIRLS IN GRADES FIVE AND SIX
IN SIX QUINCY SCHOOLS
WHO RETURNED QUESTIONNAIRES

School	Both Sexes	Boys	Girls
Squantum	57	30	27
Quincy	131	64	67
Montclair	136	71	65
Wollaston	148	87	61
Massachusetts Fields	164	82	82
Francis Parker	134	74	60
	770	408	362

Since Witty's studies on comic book interests showed slight difference in preferences between elementary grades, and because a preliminary examination of the returned questionnaires indicated that there was little significant difference in the grade responses in Quincy, it seemed advisable to study them from the standpoint of the different responses of the sexes, which was done.

The form of the questionnaire which was administered follows. It will be noted that the questions as to general reading interests are taken up first, although the investigator's primary concern was with the comic book aspect of the study. This was done so that it might not be too obvious that this was the case.

READING INTEREST QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME_____GRADE____BOY____(check)

AGE_____SCHOOL_____GIRL____(check)

1. Do you like to read?____ 2. How many books do you own?__
(not comic books)

3. About how many books have you read since September?_____
(not comic books)

4. What is your favorite type of story book? Check your choice.

Adventure_____Aviation_____Love_____Western_____

Animal_____Sports_____Mystery_____Biography_____

5. Do you have a Public Library Card?___ 6. Do you use it
Weekly_____
Monthly_____
Less Often_____

7. Do you read comic books?___ 8. Do you read them
Every day___
Once or twice a week___
Not very often___

9. Do you buy comic books? 10. Do you trade comic books?___

11. Why do you like to read comic books?(check the reason, write in any reason of your own.)

They solve crimes_____ They tell about scientific things__

They are thrilling_____ They tell about history_____

They are funny_____ They tell about patriotism_____

They are easy to read__ They tell about geography_____

Any other reason_____

12. What comic book do you like to read best of all?_____

Why do you like it?_____

13. Do you ever make or draw comics of your own?_____

Why do you like to?_____

COMIC BOOK READING IN QUINCY

As the first interest was in the answers relative to comic book reading, these will be the first considered. The results of the answers to the question, "Do you read comic books?" are presented in Table VIII, and show that of the 408 boys, 398 or 97.5 per cent read these magazines, while 348 out of the 362 girls, or 96.1 per cent, admit indulging in this form of reading. These figures appear to compare very closely with those of the Market Research Company secured from all over the country, which indicated that 95 per cent of

TABLE VIII

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF BOYS AND GIRLS WHO READ COMIC BOOKS

	Both Sexes		Boys		Girls	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Yes	746	96.8	398	97.5	348	96.1
No	24	3.2	10	2.5	14	3.9
	770	100.0	408	100.0	362	100.0

boys and 91 per cent of girls read comic books regularly, but on reference to Table IX, which shows the frequency of reading the magazines among the Quincy pupils, it is seen that a total of only 69.6 per cent of the boys, and a total of 52.8 per cent of the girls, or 61.8 per cent of both sexes, can be considered to be regular readers of the books, since that is the figure for those who read "every day" or "once or twice a week". Over 30 per cent of the boys and over 47 per cent of the girls claimed that they read comic magazines "not very often". This would indicate that the members of the group questioned were less avid readers of these books than the children in the country as a whole.

Knowing that many children are forbidden to buy comic books of their own, and that trading in books is thereby encouraged, it was felt advisable to question the boys and girls as to these activities. Tabulation of the answers to these

TABLE IX

FREQUENCY OF READING COMIC BOOKS AS STATED BY 398 BOYS AND 348 GIRLS

Frequency of reading	Both Sexes Number	Per Cent	Boys Number	PerCent	Girls Number	Per Cent
Every Day	232	31.1	164	41.2	68	19.5
Once or twice a week	229	30.7	113	28.4	116	33.3
Not very often	285	38.2	121	30.4	164	47.2
	746	100.0	398	100.0	348	100.0

questions is shown in Table X as to the purchasing of the books, and in Table XI as to the extent of the trading activity. It is rather surprising to find that the proportion of boys buying and trading is almost exactly the same, a little over 77 per cent. Among the girls trading seemed to be less popular than buying, only 64.1 per cent exchanging books, while 74.6 per cent of them buy their own. The figures show that a little over 76 per cent of both sexes buy magazines, while 71.4 per cent trade books.

REASONS WHY THE CHILDREN LIKE COMIC BOOKS

A very important question asked the children was the one in which they were requested to indicate why they liked comic books. They were directed to check any, or all, of eight stated reasons, as follows, "They solve crimes,"

"They are thrilling", "They are funny", "They are easy to read", "They tell about scientific things", "They tell about history", "They tell about patriotism", "They tell about geography". The pupils were also given an opportunity to record

TABLE X

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF BOYS AND GIRLS WHO BUY COMIC BOOKS

	Both Sexes		Boys		Girls	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Yes	586	76.1	316	77.5	270	74.6
No	184	23.9	92	22.5	92	25.4
	770	100.0	408	100.0	362	100.0

any other reason they might have for liking this form of reading.

The tabulation of the answers to this question is shown in Table XII, and makes it very evident that both boys and girls are very much in accord as to why comic magazines appeal to them. It will be noted that the number of votes taken in order show that both sexes like the books because "They are funny" more than for any other reason. That "They are thrilling" falls into second place, because "They solve crimes" is in third position, "They tell about history" takes fourth place, and the fact that "They tell about patriotism" is in fifth place. The boys put the scientific aspect of the

books in sixth place, that "They tell about geography" in seventh, and leave eighth place for the fact that "They are easy to read". The girls put the quality of easy reading in sixth place, and are tied at 38 votes each in putting science and geography in seventh or last place. The ranking of these reasons by both sexes, and by boys and girls is displayed in Table XIII.

TABLE XI

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF BOYS AND GIRLS WHO TRADE COMIC BOOKS

	Both Sexes		Boys		Girls	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Yes	550	71.4	318	77.9	232	64.1
No	220	28.6	90	22.1	130	35.9
	770	100.0	408	100.0	362	100.0

The reasons that are in the first two places, i.e., "They are funny" and "They are thrilling" coincide with the findings of McCarthy and Smith, where "humor" and "adventure" received first and second place respectively in the Chicago and Minneapolis survey. The easy-to-read element of the books was in third place, however, in McCarthy and Smith's study, and the crime solving factor in fifth position.

Other reasons received scattering consideration in this study in Quincy, among those having the most frequent

mention being, "I like the pictures", "They have interesting stories", "They tell about sports", "They tell about true facts", "They have pictures to copy", "They don't cost much", "They have color in them", "They tell about the war", "They tell about famous men".

TABLE XII

EXPRESSION OF REASONS BY BOYS AND GIRLS AS TO WHY THEY LIKE COMIC BOOKS

Reason	Both Sexes	Boys	Girls
They solve crimes	264	161	103
They are thrilling	423	229	194
They are funny	605	308	297
They are easy to read	132	73	59
They tell about scientific things	147	109	38
They tell about history	240	158	82
They tell about patriotism	219	142	77
They tell about geography	121	83	38

BEST LIKED COMIC BOOKS

In answering the question as to their favorite comic book, the boys and girls named eighty different magazines, 24 boys and 10 girls specifying none but stating that they liked "funny ones". In asking the question no list was furnished from which they might choose the one they preferred,

as has been done in some previous studies. The children, therefore, were free to make their choices from the field of about 125 publications. It seemed wisest for the purposes of this study to select the twenty books that were most frequently mentioned and arrange them in the order of preference. The voting of the children on the comic books is shown in Table XIV where the books are arranged in the order of choice. Table XV indicates the ranking given these twenty magazines by the boys, the girls, and both sexes.

Because of the fact that many of the children's favorite characters appear in several different books produced by the same publisher, these magazines were considered together in the listing, i.e., "Dick Tracy" is the leading character in the book of that name, and he also appears frequently in "Super Comics". Again, "Nancy" and "Fritzi Ritz" are the main attractions in magazines of the same names, and they also are in all issues of "Tip Top Comics". Since the aim of the question was to find out the type of comic preferred as well as the name, it was thought wise to group them after this manner.

The outstanding feature of this listing is that both boys and girls in these Quincy schools agree that Walt Disney's book, and his character, "Donald Duck", are in first place in their regard. On no other magazine do they agree exactly as

to the placement of their favorite book, but with the four publications, "Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies," "New Funnies", "Superman", and "Super Comics-Dick Tracy", they are but one place apart. As was to be expected, there were some books listed as favorites by one sex and not mentioned by the other.

TABLE XIII

RANKING GIVEN REASONS FOR LIKING COMIC BOOKS BY BOTH BOYS AND GIRLS

Reason	Both Sexes	Boys	Girls
They are funny	1	1	1
They are thrilling	2	2	2
They solve crimes	3	3	3
They tell about history	4	4	4
They tell about patriotism	5	5	5
They tell about scientific things	6	6	7.5
They are easy to read	7	8	6
They tell about geography	8	7	7.5

Thus, "Sensation Comics--Wonder Woman", and "Calling All Girls" received no votes from boys, while "Military Wings", "True Aviation", and "True Sports" got no consideration from girls.

A rather promising indication is shown in the fact

that "True Comics", produced under the auspices of Parents' Magazines, was in second place with both sexes, also in second place with the boys, and no lower than fifth choice with the girls. "Calling All Girls", another publication of Parents' Magazine, was the fourth choice of the girls, but of course received no recognition from the boys.

Another notable factor in the voting was that "Walt Disney-Donald Duck", "Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies", "New Funnies", and "Animal Comics", standing first, third, sixth, and tenth respectively with both sexes are books that contain animal characters almost exclusively.

It is most interesting to note that "Superman", and "Batman", the magazines that attained top rating in both of Witty's studies, are in thirteenth and fifteenth place respectively in this listing, while "True Comics" and "Donald Duck", which were rated tenth and eleventh respectively in Witty's Evanston survey, are in second and first place respectively with both sexes in Quincy.

Consideration should also be given to the fact that in this list of twenty comic magazines or magazine groups, five books or groups are the product of one publisher, that is, "Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies", "New Funnies", "Animal Comics", "War Heroes", and "Super Comics-Dick Tracy" are all put out by the Dell Publishing Company, Inc. Four others, namely, "Mutt and Jeff", "Sensation Comics-Wonder Woman",

TABLE XIV

EXPRESSION OF CHOICE OF BOYS AND GIRLS FOR THEIR FAVORITE COMIC BOOK SHOWING THE VOTES FOR THE TOP RANKING TWENTY BOOKS

Name of Book	Both Sexes	Boys	Girls
Walt Disney--Donald Duck	187	106	81
True Comics	93	75	18
Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies	76	28	48
Tip Top Comics-Nancy-Fritzi Ritz	48	2	46
Crime Does Not Pay	27	19	8
New Funnies	24	9	15
Mutt and Jeff	23	12	11
Captain Marvel	21	15	6
Calling All Girls	21	0	21
King Comics--Blondie	20	3	17
Sensation Comics--WonderWoman	13	0	13
Animal Comics	13	6	7
War Heroes	12	9	3
Military Wings	11	11	0
Superman	10	4	6
True Aviation	9	9	0
Super Comics--Dick Tracy	9	3	6
True Sports	9	9	0
Batman	8	6	2
Captain America	6	3	3
	640	329	311

"Superman", and "Batman" are all Superman-DC publications, while "True Comics" and "Calling AllGirls" are both produced by Parents' Magazine. Thus, it will be seen that over half of these twenty books are distributed by only three publishers.

REASONS WHY CHILDREN LIKE THEIR FAVORITE COMIC

In the second part of Question 12 in the questionnaire, the children were asked to state why they liked the particular comic book they had named. These answers tended in general to fall into certain categories which are listed in Table XVI. It will be noted that the first two reasons are confirmatory of the first two reasons shown in Table XII relative to the reasons for liking comic books in general, namely, "They are funny" and "They are thrilling". "Because they are easy to read" also falls into about the same relative place in both Table XII and Table XVI. The other reasons for liking the particular magazine give a very good idea of what children prefer in comic book reading, that is, the magazine must be interesting,exciting, and very much up to the minute.

Quite a number of the boys and girls gave no reason as to their preference for a magazine, or else stated "I just like it". There were, however, a few interesting answers that did not fall into the listed categories, such as, "The heroes get out of so many tight squeezes", "It is about animals acting as people, and not about robbers and killing", "It does

TABLE XV

RANKING GIVEN BY BOYS AND GIRLS TO THE TWENTY COMIC BOOKS VOTED AS BEST LIKED BY BOTH SEXES

Name of Book	Both Sexes	Boys	Girls
Walt Disney--Donald Duck	1	1	1
True Comics	2	2	5
Looney Tunes & Merrie Melodies	3	3	2
Tip Top Comics-Nancy-Fritzi Ritz	4	12	3
Crime Does Not Pay	5	4	10
New Funnies	6	8	7
Mutt and Jeff	7	6	9
Captain Marvel	8	5	12
Calling All Girls	8	0	4
King Comics--Blondie	9	11	6
Sensation Comics--Wonder Woman	10	0	8
Animal Comics	10	9	11
War Heroes	11	8	19
Military Wings	12	7	C
Superman	13	10	12
True Aviation	14	8	0
Super Comics--Dick Tracy	14	11	12
True Sports	14	8	0
Batman	15	9	16
Captain America	16	11	15

"It does not have murder or geography in it", "I like Donald Duck because it does not have war in it", "I like Wonder

TABLE XVI

REASONS FOR LIKING THEIR FAVORITE COMIC BOOK ARRANGED IN THE ORDER OF PREFERENCE OF BOTH BOYS AND GIRLS

Reasons	Both Sexes	Boys	Girls
Because it is funny	359	168	191
Because it is thrilling	111	53	58
Because it is interesting	63	28	35
Because it is true	42	33	9
Because it tells about heroes, wars, battles, and patriotism	40	33	7
Because it solves crimes	31	20	11
Because it tells about airplanes and aviation	12	12	0
Because it has funny animals in it	10	3	7
Because it is easy to read	7	2	5
Because it tells about sports	6	6	0
Because it tells about fashions, how to make things and how to cook	6	0	6
Because it is educational	5	3	2

Woman, because most comics are about men", "It gives the most up-to-date scientific inventions".

MANY CHILDREN DRAW THEIR OWN COMICS

The last question asked the children in regard to the comic books was relative to their interest in making or drawing comics of their own. The answers are displayed in Table XVII and show that of the 408 boys, 209 or 51.2 per cent enjoyed this activity, while 168 out of the 362 girls, or 46.4 per cent, found pleasure in this form of recreation. The per-

TABLE XVII

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF BOYS AND GIRLS WHO LIKE TO MAKE OR DRAW COMICS OF THEIR OWN

	Both Sexes		Boys		Girls	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Yes	377	49.0	209	51.2	168	46.4
No	393	51.0	199	48.8	194	53.6
	770	100.0	408	100.0	362	100.0

centage for both sexes was 49.0, very close correlation with the 50 per cent for both sexes that Witty discovered in his investigation into this same activity.

As part of this question the children were asked to give their reasons for liking this form of activity. Again the answers seemed to fall into certain categories which are listed in the order of preference in Table XVIII. Once again the

"fun" element is at the top of the list. The next four reasons in order of popularity, "I like to draw and color them", "It takes up time", "To see how well I can draw", and "It gives me practice in drawing" appear to be liked equally by both sexes, except that the testing of drawing ability appeals a little more to girls than to boys. In fact, the ninth

TABLE XVIII

CHIEF REASONS FOR LIKING TO MAKE OR DRAW THEIR OWN COMICS ARRANGED IN THE ORDER OF PREFERENCE OF BOTH BOYS AND GIRLS

Reasons	Both Sexes	Boys	Girls
It is fun	133	87	46
I like to draw and color them	52	22	30
It takes up time	50	30	20
To see how well I can draw	31	9	22
It gives me practice in drawing	16	9	7
It is interesting	13	4	9
I like to make them come out funny	13	8	5
I like to make my own and read them	9	4	5
They are easy to draw	8	8	0
I keep a scrapbook of my drawings	3	0	3

reason in order of preference was "They are easy to draw", and this quality of the comics appealed only to boys.

There were some answers given that did not fall into the categories shown in Table XVIII, some of the more interesting being, "You can make the kind you want", "It gives you a hobby", "I like to hang them up in my room", "I print a play newspaper and all papers have to have a comic strip", and "It's fun to see what others think of them".

GENERAL READING HABITS OF QUINCY CHILDREN

The first six questions in the questionnaire were presented to the children as a means of discovering how much general reading, outside the field of the comics, was being done by the boys and girls, and what their general preferences were in this form of recreation.

The replies to the question, "Do you like to read?" showed that the girls evidently enjoy this activity more than the boys. As evidenced in Table XIX, only 87.1 per cent of the boys as compared with 96.3 per cent of the girls like to

TABLE XIX

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF BOYS AND GIRLS WHO LIKE TO READ

	Both Sexes		Boys		Girls	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	PerCent
Yes	704	91.4	355	87.1	349	96.3
No	66	8.6	53	12.9	13	3.7
	770	100.0	408	100.0	362	100.0

read. Slightly over 91 per cent, or 704 of the 770 boys and girls, said they enjoyed reading.

Answers to the question as to the number of books, not comic books, owned by the children, ranged all the way from none to 350 books among the boys, and from none to 280 books among the girls. The average number owned by boys was 32.58, and the average number of books owned by girls was 31.53. The average number owned by both boys and girls was 32.09. This appears to be a fairly good average for a group of children in Grades Five and Six.

As to the number of books, not comic books, that had been read from September until the time the questionnaire was presented in December, about fifteen weeks, the boys claimed to have read an average of 10.43 books, while the girls had read an average of 13.73 books. This difference was to be expected in the light of the difference in liking to read between the sexes which is shown in Table XIX. The average number of books read during this period by both sexes was 11.98.

A tabulation of the books read in these fifteen weeks as shown in Table XX gives a better picture of this activity, however. Here it will be seen that although 38 boys and 8 girls had read no books at all in this period, 65 boys, or sixteen per cent of the group, and 54, or fifteen per cent, of the girls had read more than 30 books each, or more than two books a week. In general, although the amount of g eneral

reading claimed is not too small, it is open to much improvement.

POSSESSION AND USE OF LIBRARY CARD BY CHILDREN

The possession and frequency of use of a public library card was felt to be a good indication of the extent of the children's interest in outside reading, and Questions 5 and 6 were an attempt to secure this information. Table XXI shows the response to the inquiry as to possession of a library card, and makes it evident that an excellent proportion of this group of children were potential users of this resource. Nearly 86 per cent of the girls said they had public library cards, while over 72 per cent of the boys made the same claim. The proportion for both sexes was over 78 per cent.

Of course, the actual use of a library card is the only test of its effect upon a child's reading habits. The frequency of use of these cards by the 295 boys and 311 girls who said they possessed them, is displayed in Table XXII. This shows that over half of the girls make use of their cards weekly, and more than 28 per cent of the boys do the same. Nearly three fourths of the girls use their cards at least once a month, while almost 60 per cent of the boys do similarly. Slightly more than two thirds of both sexes indicate at least monthly use of their library cards. Only 32.8 per cent of the girls, and 40.7 per cent of the boys say that they use

their cards less often than monthly.

TABLE XX

RANGE OF BOOKS (NOT COMIC BOOKS) READ BY BOYS AND GIRLS FROM SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER 11, 1944, SHOWING NUMBERS AND PERCENTAGES

Range of Books Read	Both Sexes		Boys		Girls	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
No books read	46	5.9	38	9.3	8	2.2
1 to 5	281	36.5	159	39.0	122	33.7
6 to 10	143	18.6	73	17.9	70	19.3
11 to 15	81	10.5	31	7.6	50	13.8
16 to 20	48	6.2	17	4.1	31	8.5
21 to 25	27	3.5	11	2.7	16	4.4
26 to 30	25	3.2	14	3.4	11	3.0
More than 30	119	15.6	65	16.0	54	15.1
	770	100.0	408	100.0	362	100.0

FAVORITE TYPES OF STORIES OF QUINCY CHILDREN

In order to ascertain the favorite kind of reading of boys and girls of Grades Five and Six, they were asked to indicate their first choice of eight different types of story books, namely, adventure, aviation, love, western, animal, sports, mystery, and biography. It is realized that this is by no means a complete list of the types that might have been investigated, but it seemed to be adequate enough to assist

educators and librarians in guiding and improving children's reading patterns.

TABLE XXI

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF BOYS AND GIRLS WHO POSSESS PUBLIC LIBRARY CARDS

	Both Sexes		Boys		Girls	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Yes	606	78.7	295	72.3	311	85.9
No	164	21.3	113	27.7	51	14.1
	770	100.0	408	100.0	362	100.0

Table XXIII shows the expressed choice of the boys and girls, and makes it very evident that the adventure, or thrilling type of story is the overwhelming favorite of both sexes. As might be expected by those who are familiar with children of this age, the love story received very few votes, only eight girls and two boys showing a liking for this type. It is no surprise to find that aviation, sports, and western stories are far more popular with boys than with girls, nor is it unexpected to find that firls like animal stories somewhat better than do boys, but it is rather interesting to discover that, in this particular group anyway, mystery stories are favored by many more girls than boys, only 48 boys claiming they like these stories, while 107 girls say they prefer them.

The order of ranking of these types of books is displayed in Table XXIV and indicates that the sexes are in accord on adventure books only, which is in first place with each. The only other types of books concerning which they are nearly agreed are the western, which is in sixth place

TABLE XXII

FREQUENCY OF USE OF PUBLIC LIBRARY CARD AS STATED BY 295 BOYS AND 311 GIRLS

Frequency of Use	Both Sexes		Boys		Girls	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Weekly	249	41.1	84	28.5	165	53.0
Monthly	158	26.1	91	30.8	67	21.5
Less Often	199	32.8	120	40.7	79	32.8
	606	100.0	295	100.0	311	100.0

with both sexes and with girls, and in fifth place with boys; and the love stories, which place eighth with both sexes and the boys, and seventh with the girls. Biography, which is seventh with both sexes and boys, rather surprisingly places fourth with the girls. The children made it very clear that of these eight types of stories biography and love stories were far below the other types in their preference.

SUMMARY

In general it might be said that the detailed examina-

TABLE XXIII

EXPRESSION OF CHOICE OF FAVORITE TYPE OF STORY BOOK BY BOYS AND GIRLS

Type of Story	Both Sexes	Boys	Girls
Adventure	248	115	133
Aviation	121	114	7
Love	10	2	8
Western	45	35	10
Animal	99	30	69
Sports	65	52	13
Mystery	155	48	107
Biography	27	12	15

tion of all of the questionnaires from these children in the public schools of Quincy indicated a high degree of cooperation, and a freedom and frankness of expression of opinion that was very commendable. These factors made the writer feel that the results, whether they agree with past or future studies of this nature or not, give a reasonably accurate picture as to comic book reading and preferences, and general reading and preferences, in this group of Quincy children at this time.

TABLE XXIV

RANKING GIVEN FAVORITE TYPES OF STORY BOOKS
BY BOTH BOYS AND GIRLS

Type of Story	Both Sexes	Boys	Girls
Adventure	1	1	1
Mystery	2	4	2
Aviation	3	2	8
Animal	4	6	3
Sports	5	3	5
Western	6	5	6
Biography	7	7	4
Love	8	8	7

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

CONCLUSIONS AS TO COMIC BOOK READING IN QUINCY

A study of the data resulting from the questioning of the children of Grades Five and Six in certain Quincy schools reveals that the reading of comic books may be considered a favorite leisure time activity of these boys and girls, since more than 96 per cent of the girls and over 97 per cent of the boys admit that they read these magazines. However, when the figures on the frequency of reading these books is analyzed, it does not appear that Quincy children devote themselves to this recreation excessively, as more than 30 per cent of the boys, and over 47 per cent of the girls claim that they read these magazines "not very often". This could hardly be considered as "regular" reading.

Of those who do read comic books, to a greater or less degree, about three fourths buy their own books, indicating that the parents in this community give their children a reasonable amount of freedom in making their own purchases. This may be considered excellent judgment on their part since only by exercising their own freedom of selection and purchase can boys and girls be trained to make the right choices and expend their money wisely. Although trading in this medium may not be the most desirable training that children might engage in,

it should not be scoffed at as worthless.

Trading in comic books with their fellows is indulged in by a little less than three-fourths of the children, a rather close correlation with the number that purchase their own books. This would tend to strengthen the above conclusion that freedom to buy is wise parental judgment. If there were a great proportion of trading over buying, the indication would be that there was a good deal of parental prohibition of buying which in turn would cause more or less undercover exchange of books. That this apparent wisdom on the part of the parents has not been in vain will be evidenced when Quincy children's favorite comic magazines are considered.

Among the twenty comic books chosen as favorites by 640 boys and girls, or more than 83 per cent of the pupils questioned, there is no book that could be judged a particularly "harmful" influence. To be sure, the reading of some of them might be thought mere time-wasting by some parents or teachers, but as far as injury to children's morals, or stimulation to unsocial actions are concerned, examination failed to bring any such influences to light.

Four of the magazines, "Walt Disney-Donald Duck", "Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies", "New Funnies", and "Animal Comics", deal with the human-like antics and escapades of animals, a topic that is always popular with children, and in

these books just as interesting and harmless as the doings of "Uncle Wiggly" and "Br'er Rabbit". Two of these books, "True Comics" and "Calling All Girls" are published by Parents' Magazine and contain material that is always instructive and above reproach. Four others of these favorites are based upon true happenings in war, sports, or aviation, namely, "True Sports", "War Heroes", "Military Wings", and "True Aviation". The five books that feature the super-character, "Captain Marvel", "Sensation Comics-Wonder Woman", "Superman", "Batman", and "Captain America", are all with the exception of the latter, which by the way is at the bottom of the list of favorites, products of two publishers who have done much in the past few years to raise the standards of their magazines, largely by the employment of capable advisors from the fields of education and psychology. Four more of the books are either reprints or extensions of newspaper comic strips, namely "Tip Top Comics", "Mutt and Jeff", "King Comics", and "Super Comics". These are no more harmful and are just as entertaining in book form as they are in the daily papers. The magazine "Crime Does Not Pay", which is fifth in order of preference by both sexes, deals with crime and criminals as the name implies, and is perhaps the most exciting and least to be recommended for children's reading of the twenty, but even in this book crime is pictured as unwholesome, though thrilling, and the forces of law and order always win. On the whole, the conclusion must be made

that even when allowed to choose for themselves, these children appear to have made about the best choices possible from the many types of these books offered for sale.

The writer does not mean to imply that these boys and girls read only the comic books that they named as their favorite. When the trading in these books is considered, it must be realized that other books than those named are also read.

Examination was made of single copies of most of the other sixty-odd magazines that were mentioned by the children, and although this checking was necessarily of a somewhat cursory nature, it was surprising to find that a very small proportion of the contents would be considrred in any way harmful to the reader. In some of the books there was much repetition of the same themes over and over, and some material that to an adult appeared pointless and lacking in appeal. Children, however, don't seem to mind this. In a few magazines, usually rather new entrants to the comic book field, there were instances of fantastic adventure that might be considered a little too exciting for juvenile minds. These same books tended toward poorer printing and color work than did the older established magazines, and in many cases the cover designs were much more sensational. In general, however, the reading of even the less desirable comic books could be considered at its worst, time wasting.

The question naturally arises as to the reason for the different results secured in this investigation of favorite comic books from those secured by Witty in Evanston, Chicago, and Milwaukee in 1941. In that study, "Superman" and "Batman" were the outstanding favorites, while "Donald Duck" and "True Comics" were either not mentioned or were far down on the list. These latter magazines were the outstanding choices of the Quincy children, while "Superman"and "Batman" were in thirteenth and fifteenth place respectively. The writer did some casual interviewing of several classes in the grades questioned, and also interrogated various individual pupils in an attempt to find the answer to this difference in preference. The conclusion reached was that in the past three years there have been so many really unbelievable happenings in the war, and such rapid advancement in scientific devices and inventions, that the super-character and his fantastic adventures have become somewhat prosaic to the boys and girls, and they have tended to turn to the true story, the more or less funny antics of animals, and the comic strip in book form, as an escape from these things. Also, the magazines that have used the comic book technique to portray true happenings, and real stories of real people, have more or less successfully proved the statement that, "Truth is stranger, and a thousand times more thrilling than fiction".

In regard to making and drawing their own comics, the

conclusion must be made that it is a well-liked activity of many Quincy children, since about half of them claim that they enjoy this form of recreation. Witty found this to be true of about the same proportion of children in Evanston, Chicago, and Milwaukee. It would appear that this activity, properly utilized by a skillful teacher, may be another means of using these magazines educationally at these grade levels. Incidentally, Corporal Vic Herman, who at 25 years of age is attached to the pictorial branch of the Army's ordnance school, and who is the originator of "Winnie the Wac", a comic strip that appears in 1,200 member papers of the Army's Camp Newspaper Service, is said to have learned cartooning by copying comics at the age of three years.[1]

CONCLUSIONS AS TO GENERAL READING IN QUINCY

The reading of the comic books has seemed to have little effect upon the amount of general reading done by Quincy children. Of the 770 boys and girls questioned, 704 or slightly over 91 per cent said that they enjoyed reading. An average number of 32.09 books, not comic books, was owned by both boys and girls, and an average of 11.98 books was read by both sexes in the period from September to December 11th. Although 46 boys and girls read no books at all in this period, 281 read

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[1] "Speaking of Pictures," Life Magazine, p. 13, March 19, 1945.

from one to five books, and 143 children read from six to ten books. Eighty-one pupils read from eleven to fifteen story books, while 219, or 28.5 per cent of both sexes read from sixteen to over thirty books, or at least one book per week during the period specified. This is a very good record for pupils at this level, and would indicate that comic book reading is an adjunct to their general reading rather than a substitute for it.

This conclusion is further borne out by the data concerning the possession and use of public library cards by the pupils. Of the 770 boys and girls, 606 or 78.7 per cent said that they had cards from the public library. Of these pupils, 295 were boys, and 311 were girls. Over half of these 311 girls said that they used their cards weekly, while 28 per cent of the boys said they did likewise. Almost three-fourths of the girls used their cards at least once a month, while nearly 60 per cent of the boys did the same. Slightly more than two-thirds of both sexes claimed at least monthly use for their library cards. Only 32.8 per cent of the girls and 40.7 per cent of the boys said that they used their cards less often than once a month. This actual use of the library card is a real indication as to whether their general reading interest has been affected adversely by comic book interests. In Quincy this does not appear to be the case.

As one means of assisting educators in guiding and

improving children's reading habits, an attempt was made to ascertain what types of general reading books boys and girls preferred. From the answers received, it would seem that there was need for books with plenty of thrilling and adventurous material in them. Boys particularly need reading material rich in up-to-the-minute sports stories, and accounts of the most recent development and uses of all kinds of scientific inventions and devices in aviation, radio, radar, and the like. For girls, many of these same factors have appeal, but there is also a fertile field for the development of the intriguing aspect of fashions and home activities. Teachers and librarians must keep abreast of children's changing interests if they are to guide them properly. Writers of books for young people must consider these same interests if the books and magazines of today and tomorrow are to hold their own with comic books.

Reference to Tables XII and XVI, pages 49 and 56 respectively, will reveal another important factor that authors of children's literature should bear in mind, namely, the humorous element. If these boys and girls have told the truth about their comic book preferences, humor is what they enjoy in them above all other qualities. It must be remembered that it is children's sense of humor that must be appealed to and not adults'. This subject of just what appeals to the child's sense of humor, rather than to the adult's, is a good field

for research.

One very important advantage that comic books have over other books is their timeliness. It is impossible for ordinary children's books to compete with the comics in this respect, therefore they must offer more and better color, pictures, and generally interesting content if they are to keep the regard of the children, although the truth of the matter seems to be that each form of reading has its own appeal, and place, with boys and girls.

SUGGESTIONS TO PUBLISHERS OF COMIC BOOKS

Publishers of comic books should keep in mind that in producing these magazines they are doing more than just distributing an easily understood and entertaining form of reading to juveniles. They should realize that they have originated, and are rapidly building up, a cultural and social medium comparable in its way to the motion picture and the radio. It has become big business, and as a big business it should do a job of censorship from within its own ranks to see that such a force for social influence, mass education, and propaganda is kept on a high level. Some of the larger publishers are already doing this themselves by maintaining capable advisory councils, and by cooperating with government boards and social agencies, but all producers of these books should understand that mere entertainment value of content is not enough.

All of these publications should have as their goal positive social and civic education, as well as clean and harmless recreation.

SUGGESTIONS TO PARENTS

Parents can do their share in making the comic book keep its proper place in their children's reading. Boys and girls should be given as much freedom of choice and purchase of these books as possible, but parents can aid them in discriminating between the magazine which is merely time-wasting and the one which has social and educational value together with its entertainment. Parents should not hesitate to read these books themselves in order to see just what is in them. In this way they can help the children evaluate the content of the books, and in a tactful and not too obvious way, steer toward proper choices.

As an excellent method of guiding boys and girls toward better literature some old-fashioned reading aloud from a well-written, thrilling book can be very effective. Although this practice has fallen into disuse in most families during these recent activity-filled years, it should not be neglected if parents really wish to direct their children toward the better things in reading.

SUGGESTIONS TO TEACHERS

If teachers feel that their pupils are reading comic books at the expense of the better types of reading they should not hesitate to meet the problem freely and fairly. A few adroit questions will reveal what children in the class are interested in comics, and whether this interest is excessive. The situation should be accepted as it exists, and if the teacher is desirous of leading her pupils toward a better appreciation of good books, she should realize that there are several avenues open to her.

There should be no definite disparagement of the comic book. The children should be encouraged to discuss their favorite comics and to report to the class on what they may have read. The sameness of theme and action in these magazines will soon be revealed, and the children will be made to understand how much alike the most of these books can be, particularly the less desirable ones. At the same time the good qualities of the better comic books will be emphasized.

Carefully selected story books of literary value should be made available in the classroom and attractively displayed. These books should be rich in adventure, humor, and mystery, and there should be plenty of sports and animal stories. Among these books there should also be an ample supply of material on the latest developments in aviation, science, and industrial processes. Of course, there is not anywhere near enough good children's literature of these types being pub-

lished at present, but the determined teacher can usually get sufficient for her purpose. The emphasis should be on up-to-date, well-illustrated publications.

These books should be presented to the children in as interesting a manner as possible. Story telling, which has become somewhat of a lost art, should be practiced by the teacher in connection with these books until she can interpret them to her pupils in a way that will make the desire to read them irresistible.

Furthermore, the boys and girls should be encouraged to describe to the class the books they have read, and to tell whether they have enjoyed reading them, and why. Once the love of good books has been acquired by the children, and they discover the worthwhile material that is in them, the comics will have little, if any, permanent influence upon them.

The drawing interest that is stimulated in the children by the comic book can also be capitalized upon by the teacher. From this interest can be developed the urge to make original drawings, clay models, and other construction work, and this desire can be transferred to the same type of work suggested by the better books. Especially can this device be employed to kindle the interest of the slower readers. All of the children today need plenty of activity, directed toward creative work, and thus toward better living.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This investigation has necessarily been along the rather narrow lanes of children's interests in comic books and their general reading interests, but during its course there have appeared other roads or avenues that would appear to warrant further travelling, were time and opportunity to permit.

Whether there is a definite correlation between reading ability as established by standardized tests and the amount or kind of comic book reading done is a question that would be worth searching into. Also a study of comic book reading interest in relation to the intelligence of the child reader would possibly bring valuable facts to light.

Although it would be a task of rather large magnitude, involving as it would the study of 125 or more different comic magazine issues, a survey of all the comic books at present in the field, with a critical evaluation of their content, format, color work, and printing would certainly be of value. Because of its size, this subject might be divided into several problems for study.

SUMMARY

In closing it might be said that this present study has shown that, as far as Quincy is concerned, parents and

teachers have little to fear from the comic magazines. These books have developed into a potent educational and social force in the lives of children, and they are evidently here to stay, but if handled wisely by publisher, parent, and teacher, no dire effects upon the juvenile readers is to be apprehended. Adults should realize that the comics meet the needs and desires of children at certain ages, and that they serve a transitory function that should lead them to better reading interests and deeper appreciation of good literature. Finally, as in many other activities of children, correct choice and moderation in reading comic books should be advocated, rather than prohibition and total abstinence.

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